



## Tillman memo contradicted medal citation

General who approved Silver Star warned others of 'friendly fire' suspicions

**The Associated Press**

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SAN FRANCISCO - Just a day after approving a medal claiming former NFL player Pat Tillman had been cut down by "devastating enemy fire" in Afghanistan, a high-ranking general tried to warn President Bush that the story might not be true, according to testimony obtained by The Associated Press.

Despite this apparent contradiction, Lt. Gen. Stanley McChrystal was spared punishment in the latest review of Tillman's shooting. On Tuesday, the Army overruled a Pentagon recommendation that he be held accountable for his "misleading" actions.

In a sometimes contentious November interview under oath and via videoconference, Pentagon investigators sharply questioned McChrystal about the conflicting accounts, according to the testimony obtained by the AP under the Freedom of Information Act.

McChrystal acknowledged he had suspected several days prior to approving the Silver Star citation on April 28, 2004, that Tillman may have died by fratricide.

He said that suspicion led him to send a memo to top generals imploring "our nation's leaders," specifically "POTUS" — the acronym for the president — to avoid cribbing the "devastating enemy fire" explanation from the award citation for their speeches.

"Why did you recommend the Silver Star one day and then the next day send a secret back-channel message warning the country's leaders about using information from the Silver Star in public speeches because they might be embarrassed if they do?" an investigator asked McChrystal.

Despite numerous questions, the general never directly explained the discrepancies.

"That question seems to imply the fact that we were giving the award with one hand and then with the other hand saying it was something different," he protested. "But that's exactly the opposite of the way I felt and feel now."

### **'Might cause public embarrassment'**

McChrystal told the investigators that he believed Tillman deserved the award, and that he wanted to warn top U.S. military and political leadership that friendly fire was a possibility.

"Because I thought it was friendly fire I thought it was important that key attendees know that that theory could become the finding of the investigation, and if they were going to make a statement about 'killed by enemy fire,' it might not be certain," McChrystal said.

The "secret back-channel message" was a memo known as a P4 that McChrystal wrote on April 29, 2004, to Gen. John Abizaid, head of Central Command, and to two other generals.

The P4 noted rumors that Bush and other top officials "might include comments about Cpl. Tillman's heroism and his approved Silver Star medal in speeches." He warned that it "might cause public embarrassment" if the circumstances of Tillman's death were released.

In the Silver Star citation, McChrystal had praised Tillman for placing himself "in the line of devastating enemy fire."

Tillman's comrades who were nearby in the moments before he was killed have testified that fellow Americans were shooting at them. A few also have testified that the enemy may have been firing as well, but

ineffectively. No enemy bullet, rocket or mortar appeared to come close to Tillman during his last minutes on a barren hillside in eastern Afghanistan.

McChrystal was then and remains commander of the covert Joint Special Operations Command, the military's clandestine "black ops" corps, which fights in the shadows of battles in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond.

### **'Not in line with normal policies'**

Among those who work with him, McChrystal is respected and admired for his leadership and integrity. He also has the trust of Bush, who — despite the secrecy of McChrystal's operation — publicly praised him last year when Al-Qaida in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed in a U.S. airstrike.

Attempts to reach McChrystal this week by telephone and e-mail were unsuccessful.

McChrystal also declined an invitation to appear Wednesday before a congressional committee investigating the misinformation given to Tillman's family and the American public following his friendly fire death in Afghanistan.

Tillman's parents have been critical of the military's punishments surrounding their son's death. The Army waited about five weeks after it suspected friendly fire was involved before telling Tillman's family the true nature of his death.

McChrystal testified in a previous investigation that he had decided not to tell the Tillman family of friendly fire "based on my thought that providing incorrect information before an initial investigation was complete was not in line with normal policies." However, Army regulations require that families be notified when such an investigation is under way — not when it is completed.

Like several other officers involved in the case, McChrystal testified that he did not know about the rule.

After a year-long inquiry that ended in March, the Pentagon's acting inspector general found that McChrystal should be held "accountable for the inaccurate and misleading assertions" in the Silver Star award recommendation; and for failing to notify the officials processing the award that friendly fire was likely.

"The P4 message did not request or suggest any action to correct the information in the award recommendation package," wrote Thomas Gimble, then the Pentagon's top investigator.

### **'Address and take action'**

Gimble recommended that the acting Army secretary "address and take action" against McChrystal and one subordinate for failing "to submit an accurate Silver Star recommendation." McChrystal was the highest-ranking of nine officers Gimble recommended be "held accountable" for their involvement in the aftermath of Tillman's death.

But the Army cast that aside Tuesday when it overruled the Pentagon's recommendation.

Another Army general, William Wallace, concluded McChrystal had behaved reasonably in assuming the supporting material presented to him for Tillman's Silver Star recommendation was accurate. The Army's statement Tuesday made no mention of McChrystal's acknowledgment under oath that he had known prior to approving the Silver Star that fratricide was a strong possibility.

Asked by a reporter at a news conference Tuesday why McChrystal did not simply call Tillman's family, Army Secretary Pete Geren said that was the job of another chain of command run by Lt. Gen. Philip R. Kensinger Jr., who then led Army special operations forces.

Kensinger, who has since retired, was censured by the Army for allegedly lying to investigators and for a "a failure of leadership."

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